中国户县农民画

PEASANT PAINTINGS FROM HUHSIEN COUNTY OF CHINA

Cover: Old Party Secretary

Liu Chih-teh

Peasant Paintings from Huhsien County of China

Huhsien County is situated in the central part of Shensi Province of China. Facing the Weiho River in the north and falling back on the Chinling Mountains in the south, it is a stretch of fertile land and rich in produce. The county comprises 21 rural people's communes and has a population of 430,000. It is an advanced unit in the movement to learn from Tachai in agriculture.

Huhsien peasant paintings first appeared during the Great Leap Forward in 1958. As China's industry and agriculture were having an all-round development, a new situation also prevailed in the field of culture and education. In many parts of the country, wall painting flourished, poetry-writing and painting became very popular. To go along with this trend the county Party committee initiated an art class at the Kanyu Reservoir construction site and trained some 20 amateur artists from among the peasants. The peasant-artist Li Feng-lan was one of the trainees. Over the past decade and more this contingent of amateur artists with poor and lower-middle peasants as its backbone has grown considerably; up to now there are over 1,000 in number. They are mostly ordinary commune members and the rest cadres at the grassroots level, former poor peasants, ex-farm hands, veteran artisans as well as educated youths who have returned to the villages after finishing school. The great majority of them are both skilled in farming and active in artistic creation. Since 1958, they have adhered to the principle of painting in spare-time only, doing small-scale pieces in a variety of styles and economizing on materials. Closely linking their creativeness with the central tasks in different periods, they have produced altogether over 70,000 paintings. In the history of fine arts it is unprecedented that so many beautiful pictures have been painted by the hands of those who work with hoes the year round. Full of revolutionary poetry and militant zeal, these paintings belong to a new form of art.

Huhsien peasant paintings display distinct characteristics and high militancy. The amateur artists boundlessly love socialism. With tremendous political enthusiasm and using their paintbrush they sing the praises of the great leader Chairman Mao and his revolutionary line, the great achievements in socialist revolution and socialist construction, the mass movement to learn from Tachai in agriculture and all the new emerging things. In taking part in the three great revolutionary movements of class struggle, the struggle for production and scientific experiment, they strive to create heroic images of the workers, peasants and soldiers. Hence, the subject matter is fresh and varied, the theme clear-cut and striking; what to eulogize or to oppose is clearly expressed, and what to love or to hate is unequivocal in the painters' minds.

Huhsien peasant paintings come out of the application of the principle of combining revolutionary realism with revolutionary romanticism. They convey a strong feeling of the present era and attain a high ideological level as they reflect real life and revolutionary ideal. They take their themes from real life but are elevated above it. "Crops can no longer live when separated from soil, amateur artists can achieve nothing when divorced from labour," and this is their unanimous conclusion. They stand in the van of the movement to learn from Tachai, live among fellow commune members and draw their subject matter from things familiar to themselves. They are not only well acquainted with the physical appearance of the poor and lower-middle peasants but understand even better their inner world. Quite a few works are based on the realities of the painters' own lives. *A Production Brigade Clinic* is done by Li Cheng-hsuan, a barefoot doctor himself, and *A Production Brigade's Kindergarten* by Yen Yu-chen, an elder woman and kindergartener. *A Night School in the Mountains* is the work of Hsu Yu-mei, a woman who lives in the mountain forest. She was born to a poor family and followed her parents to the mountains to escape famine before liberation. She longed to attend school in her childhood but that was something impossible. After liberation, night schools have been set up in the almost illiterate mountain areas. Hsu was enrolled in one of them and she soon became an activist in study. She depicted in this painting how the commune members of a production team in a mountain area, defying darkness and peril, made their way to the night school on a rough trail. The Taiping River used to bring great harm to Huhsien County. Over 200 amateur artists came to the worksite when the river was being harnessed. They worked and also did propaganda. More than 30 of them were elected heroes or model workers in harnessing the river. Apart from their intense labour, they found time to do some 2,000 sketches and 60-odd paintings, among them the *Night Battle*. Their works are not mere reproductions of real life, but the result of its typification, artistic elevation and crystallization. Thus, they are filled with aspirations for a bright future and rejoicings over their present life, heartening and invigorating. From their works one can see the colorful militant life in China's socialist countryside as well as the profound changes that have taken place in the mental outlook of the commune members.

Under the guidance of the principles set forth by Chairman Mao of **"letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend"**, and **"making the past serve the present and foreign things serve China"**, and **"weeding through the old to bring forth the new"**, the Huhsien peasant artists have assimilated in their works the art of traditional Chinese paintings, particularly, the traditional folk art of New Year pictures, wall paintings and papercuts. And in the light of actual life, theyhave boldly made creations and innovations and developed gradually an original style of their own.

The fact that Chinese peasants have taken the paintbrush in hand and entered the arena of art shows that the working people are not only creators of material wealth, but also creators of intellectual wealth and masters of culture and art. This is of far-reaching significance to the abolition of the distinction between manual workers and brain workers.

Old Party Secretary *Liu Chih-teh*

Practising Marksmanship During a Break

On "Old Party Secretary"

Liu Chih-teh

The revolutionary leading cadres are those who guide the mass movements. The cadres, especially the leading cadres at various levels, study conscientiously Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung Thought, and applying it in practice they lead the masses of the people to achieve one victory after another in socialist revolution and socialist construction. Many leading cadres with whom I have come into personal contact have never stopped taking part in manual labour and always had the interests of the masses at heart. Their noble traits of character have left a deep impression in my mind, and whenever I take up my brush, I feel the urge to create their outstanding image.

When I worked at a water conservancy project sometime ago, I made it a point to do a few sketches of cadres participating in manual work. Subsequently, I worked out a rough drawing of a cadre deeply absorbed in study during a work break while smoking a pipe. Employing a traditional Chinese painting technique *kung pi cho se* (i.e. water colour very carefully and precisely done, with meticulous attention to details), I tried hard to make my painting vigorous, solid, fresh and pleasing, so that it not only closely reflects the theme but also appeals to the viewers and deeply inspires them. In the *Old Party Secretary*, I hoped to present the militant image of the many leading Party members at various levels in China today, who study conscientiously, keep themselves in dynamic spirits and make steady progress on the road of continuing the revolution.

Peasant artist Liu Chih-teh (party secretary of a production brigade) returning home after work. On the wall at the entrance of his house he has painted a mural to remind himself that a cadre should perseveringly participate in manual labour in order to prevent and combat revisionism.

Li Feng-lan

Spring Hoeing

Peasant artist Li Feng-lan at work.

On "Spring Hoeing"

Li Feng-lan

In the early spring of 1973, when the willow trees were turning green, the peach flowers blossoming pink and the swallows flying low in the sky, the women members of our production brigade enthusiastically plunged into the movement of grasping revolution and promoting production. Joyously, we marched into the fields and started the spring hoeing in high spirits. Led by the head of the women's team, we went to the fields against the cold wind in the early morning and got home under the evening mist, working overtime for days on end. In this way, we successfully finished our work in less than ten days, giving full play to the role of the women as "pillars propping up half of the sky." There was also the bride who came to join us on the second day of her wedding. All this set me thinking of many things and inspired me to paint a picture with spring hoeing as the theme. After numerous rounds of thinking, sketching and revising, the painting began to take shape and came into its present form.

Li Feng-lan with other members of her cotton group working in the field.

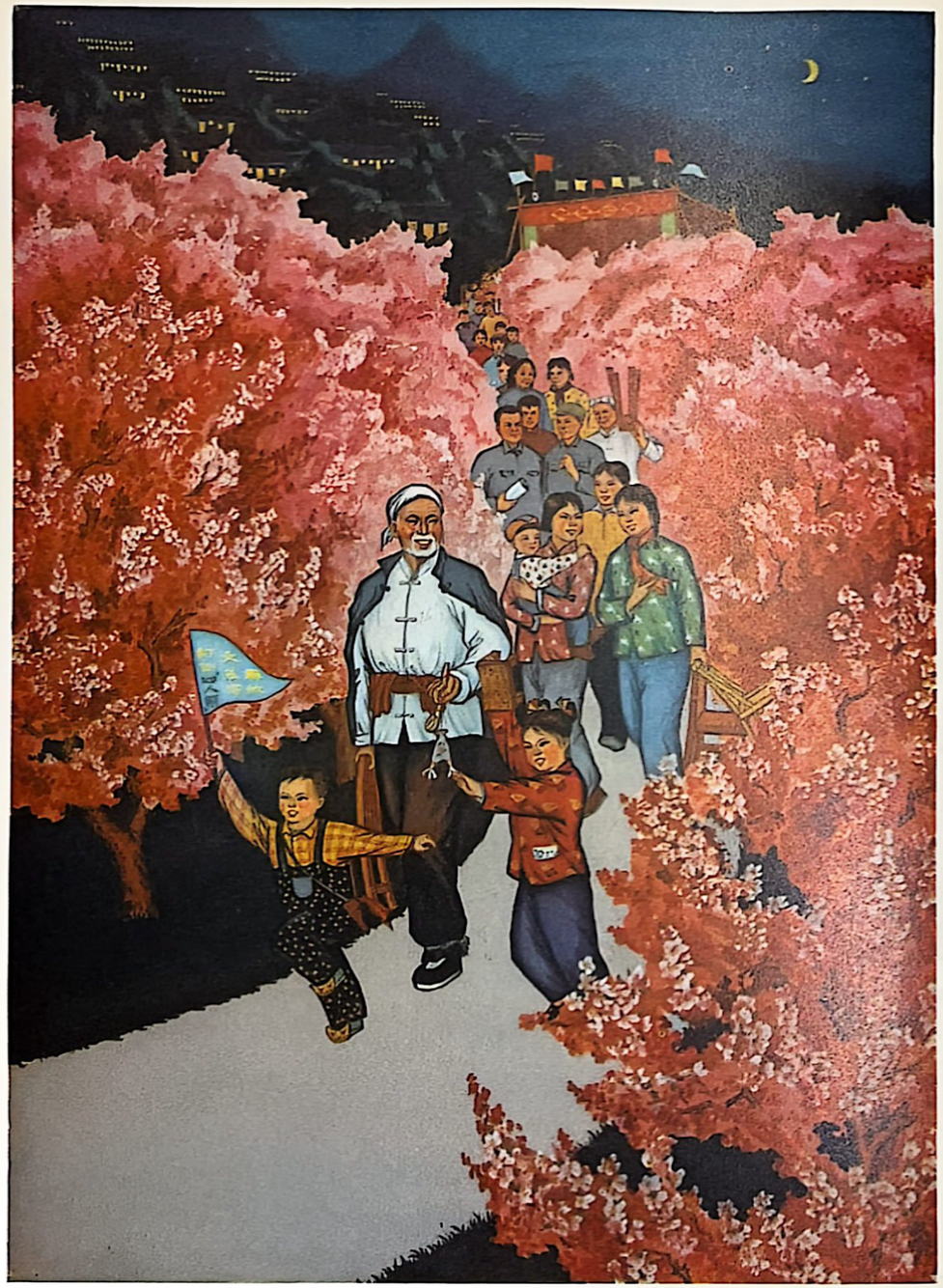
On "Occupying the Ideological-Cultural Field in the Countryside"

Chang Lin

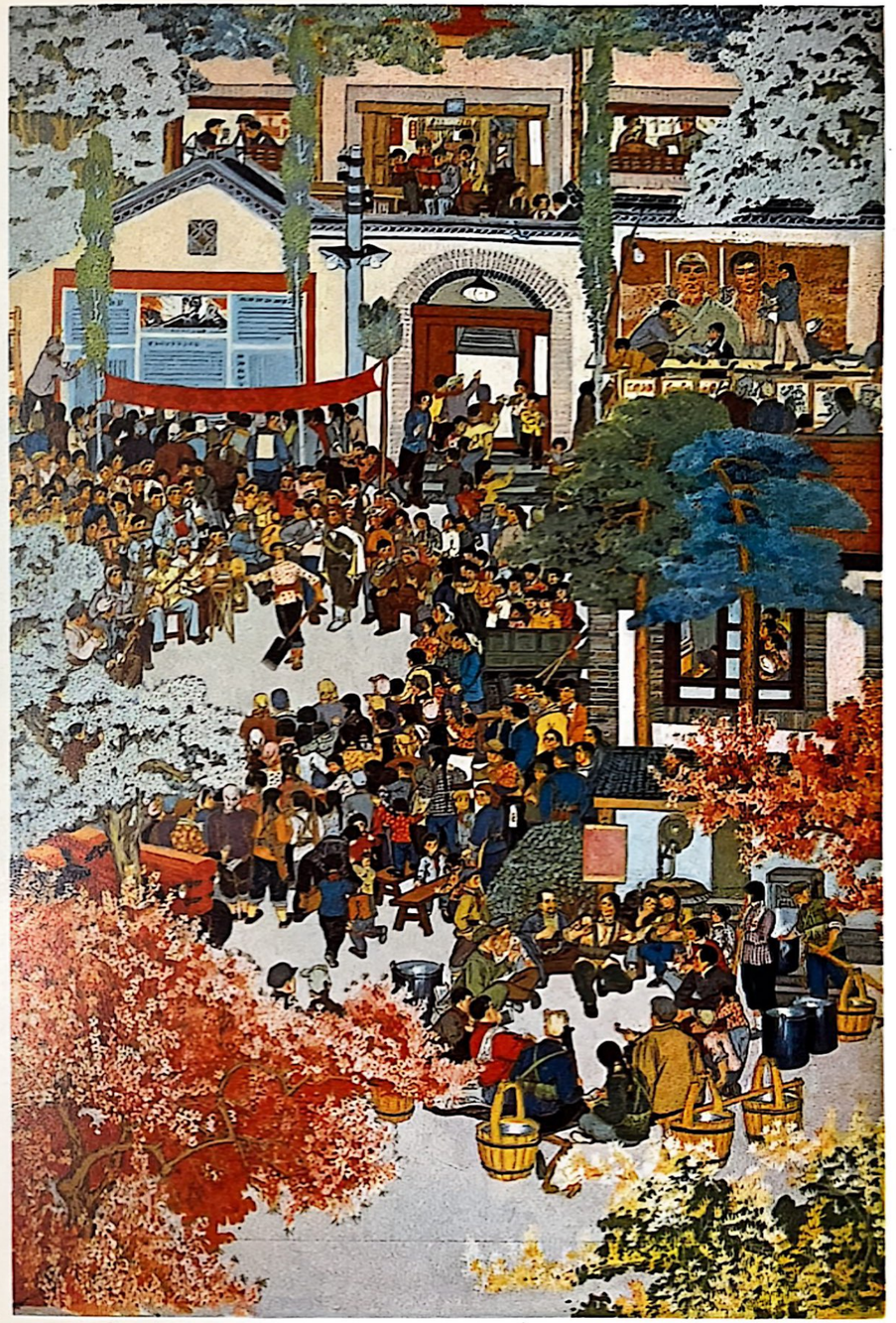
Through the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, the Chinese people's ideology, culture, habits and customs have undergone tremendous changes. Socialist ideology has taken hold of the entire cultural sphere in the rural areas and the proletarian dictatorship has been greatly strengthened. A picture of socialist cultural activities in various forms presented itself in my mind. After mature consideration, my conception became clear and I made a preliminary sketch, setting in a scene of blossoming spring as the theme requires. Then I painted it with special emphasis on the happy life in the socialist society and made it as colourful and bright as possible.

P e a s a n t painters w o r k i n g at a brigade's cultural center in their spare time.

Digging a Well *Fan Chih-Hua*



Return from a Cultural Evening *Liu Ya-chien*



Occupying the Ideological-Cultural Field in the Countryside *Chang Lin*

The commune members are on their way to the fields. The amateur artists always carry their sketch books with them in addition to the farming tools.

"We Love Chairman Hua" *Yen Yu-chen*

On "Digging a Well"

Fan Chih-hua

The Hsin Hsian brigade of our commune used to live at the mercy of weather. In the movement of learning from Tachai in agriculture, by giving full play to the revolutionary spirit of hard work and self-reliance and combining modern with indigenous methods, this brigade succeeded in sinking numerous wells on the sandy ground, a thing which had been deemed impossible. It was indeed heart-gladdening to see the clear water running into the fields. Feeling an irresistible urge, I took up my painting brush to try my hand at drawing *Digging a Well,* a theme in life I knew so well. At the start, I sketched a well with a big opening, but it was impossible to depict the activities both inside the well and at the well-head, and all my habitual methods of composition failed to yield good results. I began to feel it was too difficult for me, and was about to give it up. But, whenever I saw the red flags fluttering at the worksite and the commune members battling against nature to do a good job in building socialism, I was infected by their fiery revolutionary enthusiasm. I would ask myself, if the poor and lower-middle peasants could get the underground water out by their own hands, why couldn't I portray their mental outlook with my painting brush? The heroic deeds of the poor and lower-middle peasants gave me, an ordinary peasant who had just started to learn painting, infinite strength and determination. After carefully thinking over the theme and frequently discussing it with my workmates, I made several bold experiments, out of which I painted this picture from a wide angle of vision from above, a method which I had never tried before.

Announcement of the Two Great Happy Events in October 1976

Cheng Chih-chun

A crowd gathers on the street to look at peasant artists making a mural painting.

Practising Marksmanship During a Break

Chang Chun-hsia

Every Family Has Money in the Bank

Liu Hui-sheng

Night Battle at the Weiho River Worksite

Li Hung-chun

A Production Brigade's Chicken Farm

Ma Ya-li

Peasant artists of Hushien County exchanging experience in painting.

The rural artists work on a wall painting in a village.

Tung Cheng-yi

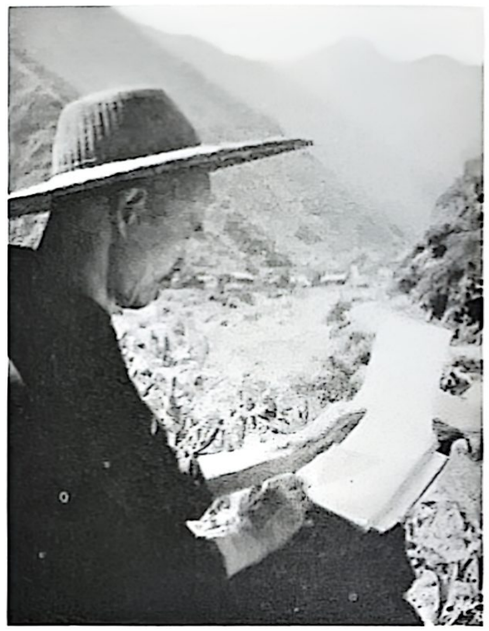
A Commune Fishpond

On "A Commune Fishpond"

Tung Cheng-yi

"Chairman Mao pointed out the broad road. The people's commune is the golden bridge." This is how I feel from the bottom of my heart, from the heart of an emancipated painting craftsman and ordinary commune member. For a long time I have been wanting to use my paintbrush to express my deep attachment for the commune.

One day in March 1973, at the Yu Chan people's commune, I saw fish jumping in a newly enlarged fish pond, their scales bright and shining under the sun. A feeling of joy hard to express in words filled my heart. I looked at them and toyed with an idea, and I looked and thought of it again. A picture then seemed to form in mind as if a lot of multi-coloured fish were leaping and swimming towards me, and a group of chatting and laughing commune members dragging the net and hauling in the fish. . . . An all-round development of farming, forestry. animal husbandry, side occupation and fishery was taking place in the people's commune; in these good days each step, indeed. brought us to a new heaven. Thus the conception of *A Commune Fishpond* began to take tangible shape in my mind. After a period of hard work, I eventually finished painting this picture.



Tung Cheng-yi, a peasant painter, making a sketch during a break at work.

CHINESE PEOPLE'S ASSOCIATION FOR
FRIENDSHIP WITH FOREIGN COUNTRIES